

Optical grating fabrication apparatus comprises a phase mask (40) for dividing an incident light beam (30) into a plurality of diffracted beams; and a focusing arrangement (60) for receiving light from the phase mask and converging at least two non-zero-order diffracted beams together so as to generate an interference region between the converged beams so that a grating structure can be impressed on an optical waveguide (80) placed in the interference region; the phase mask and at least a part of the focusing arrangement being moveable with respect to one another so as to alter the angle of convergence of the converged beams.

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FABRICATION OF OPTICAL WAVEGUIDE GRATINGS

This invention relates to methods and apparatus for fabricating optical waveguide gratings.

5 Optical waveguide gratings, such as optical fibre gratings, can be formed by exposing the core of an optical fibre to an interference pattern defining the period of the grating. The first experimental demonstration of fibre grating formation in the core of an optical fibre was by launching laser light along an optical fibre from an Argon-ion laser operating at 514 nm, so that a grating was formed over the entire
10 length of the fibre.

More recent techniques have used interference patterns incident on the side of the fibre to impress a grating structure on photosensitive regions within the fibre core and/or cladding.

15 The methods used to generate such an interference pattern have included prism-interferometers [see publication reference "Broer" cited below], diffraction grating / phase-masks [Anderson] and combined phase-mask and prism-interferometers [Armitage]. A further development is described in GB-A-2 272 075, where a phase mask is imaged onto the fibre core using a lens.

20 However, an established problem is that of tuning the pitch of the grating in the fabrication process - for example, to generate a long (several centimetres or more) chirped grating where the pitch varies along the length of the grating.

25 This is a very difficult task with an multi-beam interferometer, because the coherence length of the writing laser beam makes careful matching of the different optical paths critical to maintaining a good visibility of the generated interference pattern.

30 Tuning of the grating pitch from uniform phase masks have been reported before from both a phase mask magnification technique [Prohaska] and a tuning scheme based on a beam diameter dependant maximum tuning [Cole and GB9509874.5]. In both cases the maximum tuning possible is ~ (about) 10 nm (nanometres) with the latter system being the more flexible.

The present invention provides optical grating fabrication apparatus comprising:

a phase mask for dividing an incident light beam into a plurality of diffracted beams; and

a focusing arrangement for receiving light from the phase mask and converging at least two non-zero-order diffracted beams together so as to generate an interference region between the converged beams so that a grating structure can be
5 impressed on an optical waveguide placed in the interference region;

the phase mask and at least a part of the focusing arrangement being moveable with respect to one another so as to alter the angle of convergence of the converged beams.

10 In the invention, a phase mask is imaged onto the waveguide using a lens. However, rather than the usual step of fixing the relative positions of the phase mask and lens to a separation equal to the focal length of the lens (which would normally be expected for maximum mechanical stability of the system), the counter-intuitive step is taken of altering the separation of the phase mask and lens to alter the angle
15 of convergence of the converged beams. The skilled man will immediately then understand that this in turn alters the fringe pitch incident on the waveguide.

Prototype embodiments of the invention can demonstrate a tuning range of 27nm, i.e. about three times the best tuning range so far reported.

20 The advantages of the invention compared with other techniques used to write fibre Bragg gratings and in particular when used together with techniques where the fibre is moved in the interference pattern behind the either chirped or uniform phase-mask, e.g the 'Step and repeat' technique, by GB9617688.8, are that it provides no contact or close contact between the fibre and phase mask thereby avoiding the static electricity that builds up between moving glass surfaces.

25 By using a lens, the writing beam power can be focused more precisely onto the optical waveguide core of the grating host rather than through the side of e.g the optical fibre.

30 It has been known for two years before the priority date of this application [Ouellette] that the production of long phase-masks (> 5 cm) is not possible with continuous techniques, and so step-write e-beam techniques must be employed. The repeat precision between concatenated sections, however, is not good enough to ensure a separation on the phase-mask period thereby introducing periodic 'stich-

errors' along the length of the phase-mask. Imperfect overlap regions will cause phase-shifts that will reduce the quality of the gratings written from such a phase-mask. Even scanning along non-stitched phase-mask will limit the grating quality to the uniformity in the groove depth pattern of the phase-mask. A variation in the groove depth of the phase-mask will cause a power fluctuation in the zeroth-order hence power fluctuations in the interfering -1st and 1st orders of the phase-mask thereby leading to an increased background (dc) level in the grating and a reduction in the visibility of interference pattern. All these factors have tended to reduce the quality of the gratings produced. In contrast, the invention can avoid or alleviate this phase-mask grating quality degradation simply because the writing beam position on the phase-mask can be kept constant.

Although the invention can be embodied as a 'free-space' interferometer (sometimes perceived as a disadvantage), the invention can in fact be embodied using only a single lens to catch and recombine the interfering beams. Furthermore, the tuning scheme is advantageously simplified because it only includes a relative movement of the lens with respect to the phase mask. If this movement is made along the direction of the writing beam, the coherence between the two interfering beams is not affected.

The invention also provides an optical grating fabrication method comprising the steps of: directing a light beam onto a phase mask to divide the light beam into a plurality of diffracted beams; converging at least two non-zero-order diffracted beams together using a focusing arrangement so as to generate an interference region between the converged beams so that a grating structure can be impressed on an optical waveguide placed in the interference region; and providing relative movement between the phase mask and at least a part of the focusing arrangement so as to alter the angle of convergence of the converged beams.

The invention will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of grating fabrication apparatus according to an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 is a graph showing theoretical tuning curves for relative lens movement;

Figure 3a illustrates an empirical tuning curve for a lens with $f = 17.7$ mm, with a fixed lens position and a moving phase-mask position;

Figure 3b illustrates an empirical tuning curve for a lens with $f = 17.7$ mm, with a fixed phase-mask position and a moving lens position;

5 Figures 4a and 4b illustrate empirical reflection and time delay characteristics of a 85 cm long linearly chirped fibre grating written with the interferometer of Figure 1.

Referring now to Figure 1, a laser source (e.g. a UV laser source) 10 and a collimating lens 20 generate a collimated beam of UV light 30. The beam is incident on a phase mask 40, giving rise to so-called 0th-order, -1st order and 1st order diffracted beams (and possibly other higher order beams which are not relevant to the present explanation). The 0th order beam propagates in the same direction as the incident beam, whereas the -1st and 1st order beams are angularly deviated with respect to the incident beam, as illustrated.

15 An opaque block 50 is placed in the path of the 0th-order beam, so that only the -1st and 1st order beams are incident on an anti reflection coated biconvex spherical lens 60.

20 The -1st and 1st order beams incident on the lens 60 are brought to a focus in a region 70 overlapping the core (or other region in which a grating is to be impressed) of an optical fibre waveguide 80. An interference pattern is formed between the two beams, and a grating structure is written at the pitch of the interference fringes.

25 Apart from any translation stage (not shown) which may be used to scan the writing beam along the fibre (or vice versa - see GB9617688.8), the phase mask 40 and/or the lens 60 are mounted on a translation stage 90 (shown in schematic dotted line for clarity of the diagram) which, under the control of a control circuit 100, is arranged to alter the relative separation of the phase mask 40 and the lens 60. The effect of such a separation, and some experimental results obtained using this technique, will be described further below.

30 For the following discussions, the distance from the interference point on the phase-mask P_1 to the lens is denoted by d_1 and the distance from the lens to the image point P_2 is denoted by d_2 . The period of the phase-mask is called λ_{pm} and the focal

length of the lens f . From the literature is known that the angle between the diffracted orders through the phase-mask is given by

$$\theta_{pm} = \sin^{-1}\left(\frac{\lambda_i}{\lambda_{pm}}\right) \quad (1)$$

with λ_i being the wavelength of the light incident perpendicular on the phase-mask. The angle between the interfering -1 and 1 order is therefore $2\theta_{pm}$. The period of the interference is

$$\Lambda = \frac{\lambda_i}{2 \sin(\theta_{pm})} \quad (2)$$

The relation between the focal length f , d_1 and d_2 is according to the *imaging equation* given by

$$\frac{1}{f} = \frac{1}{d_1} + \frac{1}{d_2} \quad (3)$$

and therefore in the case of 1:1 imaging of P_1 in P_2 , $d_1 = d_2 = 2f$.

To relate exemplary numbers to the equations presented above a phase-mask period of 1060 nm and UV-light of wavelength 244 nm is used. From (1) this gives a separation angle of 13.31° between the diffracted orders and therefore 26.62° between the -1 and 1 order. According to (2) this gives a period of 530 nm of the interference pattern. If a standard lens diameter D of 25.4 mm (1 inch) is chosen the clear diameter D_{cl} of a lens is typically the centre 85% of the diameter. Hence D_{cl} is 21.6 mm. The maximum distance from the phase-mask to the lens is d_{max} :

$$\tan(\theta_{pm}) = \frac{\frac{1}{2} \cdot D_{cl}}{d_{max}} \quad (4)$$

and therefore

$$\begin{aligned} d_{\max} &= \frac{D_{cl}}{2 \tan(\theta_{pm})} \quad (5) \\ &= \underline{45.6 \text{ mm}} \end{aligned}$$

According to (3) the maximum focal length of a 1 inch lens then has $f_{\max} = 22.8$ mm.

5 Tuning of the period of the interfering beams and hence tuning of the Bragg wavelength can be achieved by varying the distance d_1 . According to the imaging equation (3) the relation of d_2 for fixed f and varying d_1 is

$$d_2(d_1) = \frac{f}{1 - \frac{f}{d_1}}, \quad d_1 \in [f; d_{\max}] \quad (6)$$

If the beam is assumed to exit the lens at the same distance from the centre-axis of the lens as it enters it, as is the case of the thin-lens approximation, the relation between θ_{pm} and θ_{im} , see Figure 1, becomes

$$\tan(\theta_{im}) \cdot d_2 = \tan(\theta_{pm}) \cdot d_1 \Rightarrow \theta_{im} = \underline{\tan^{-1}\left(\frac{d_1}{d_2} \tan(\theta_{pm})\right)} \quad (7)$$

10 Now an expression for the angle between the interfering beams in the imaging plane as function of d_1 has been obtained, an expression for the Bragg wavelength tuning as function of detuning from the 1:1 imaging case can be obtained. This expression becomes

$$\Delta \lambda_B = n_{ave} \cdot \lambda_i \cdot \left(\frac{1}{\sin(\theta_{im})} - \frac{1}{\sin(\theta_{pm})} \right) \quad (8)$$

where n_{ave} is the average refractive index in the grating.

Figure 2 shows a graph of equation (8) for different values of f with $n_{ave}=1.46$. From Figure 2 is seen that employing a shorter focal length lens gives a higher wavelength shift per unit length change and hence higher precision on the tuning of d_1 is required.

The maximum detuning to shorter wavelengths is obtained with $d_1 = d_{max}$ giving the maximum angle between the interfering beams in the imaging plane. In principle any Bragg wavelength above the wavelength defined by the phase-mask can be achieved by tuning d_1 towards f .

One advantage of this method to tune the pitch of a phase-mask is that the width of the interfering beams is no more limited to the approx. 30 μm diameter beam in front of the phase-mask. This diameter is required in order to expose the fibre core with the interfering UV coming from the splitting angle of the orders from the phase-mask, see (1).

This method enables the interfering beams to be focused on the fibre core instead of on the side of the fibre and therefore have higher fluence in the region of interest. Another point is that very wide-band chirped gratings can be fabricated by scanning the lens during writing. Furthermore this technique optimises the writing of superstructure gratings that often requires grating subsection lengths down to $\sim 20 \mu\text{m}$.

Ideally, the translation stage 90 that controls the position of the lens with respect to the phase-mask needs a precision of $\sim 1 \mu\text{m}$ and should have a maximum travel of a few hundred microns in order to make use of the full potential of the method. However, less precise stages and/or stages with lesser travels can of course be used.

A collimated beam on the phase-mask is preferred in order to avoid any distortion coming from a diverging beam. The latter point can be addressed by providing the collimating lens 20 or a collimating telescope in its place before the phase-mask.

Some of the issues discussed above are summarised in the table I below.

TABLE I

Comments \forall	10 mm	15 mm	18 mm	20 mm	22.6 mm
Minimum λ_B	553.1 nm	819.7 nm	1044.8 nm	1229.3 nm	1547.6 nm
Device length	~ 6 cm	~ 7 cm	~ 8 cm	~ 9 cm	~ 10 cm
Tuning slope	1.4 nm / 10 μ m	1 nm / 10 μ m	0.83 nm / 10 μ m	0.75 nm / 10 μ m	0.7 nm / 10 μ m

The numbers in table I are based on

$$\lambda_{pm}=1060 \text{ nm}$$

$$\lambda_f=244 \text{ nm}$$

$$n_{ave}=1.46$$

Lens diameter; 25.4 mm

Figures 3a, 3b, 4a and 4b illustrate empirical results obtained with a prototype device according to Figure 1.

Figures 3a and 3b illustrate two tuning curves obtained for a lens with a focal length $f=17.7$ mm and $\lambda_{pm}=1057.1$ nm. Figure 3a shows a tuning range from 1535.5 nm to 1550 nm with a slope of 0.94nm/10 μ m obtained by moving the phase-mask and keeping the lens in a fixed position. Figure 3b shows a tuning range from 1522 nm to 1549 nm with a slope of 0.92 nm/10 μ m obtained by moving the lens and for fixed phase-mask position.

Figures 4a and 4b illustrate empirical reflection and time delay characteristics of a linearly chirped fibre grating written with the interferometer of Figure 1. The grating is 85 cm long has a 3 nm bandwidth and is written using 100 mW of CW UV-light from a frequency doubled Ar-ion laser. The grating is written in a D₂-loaded high NA (0.2) fibre.

The advantage of using a bi-convex lens to catch and recombine the diffracted orders from the phase mask is that it is known as the 'best form' for 1:1 imaging.

This because it does not introduce any aberrations. Furthermore the embodiment is simple and robust it employs only one lens element within the interferometer. Moreover, by blocking the transmitted 0th order beam from the phase mask a better visibility is obtained in the interference pattern between the interfering -1 and 1 orders.

5 Certain precautions can be taken into account in order to further improve the performance of the interferometer of Figure 1. One of these is that the best results are expected to be obtained when the interference point in the imaging plane is composed of plane waves. This is obtained by focusing the collimated writing beam on to the phase mask with a lens that has exactly *twice* the focal length to that of the
10 interferometer lens itself.

The apparatus of Figure 1 has been used to produce an 85 cm long chirped fibre grating written with an interferometer with a 1 inch diameter lens to show the practicality of such a device in terms of the compactness (a prototype device length of just ~ 7 cm), but the skilled man will of course appreciate that interferometers with
15 bigger lenses might be more practical for specific purposes, where the reduced tolerance on the tuning of the Bragg wavelength from bigger lenses might be perceived as an advantage.

The apparatus, as mentioned above, lends itself to use with a system such as that described in GB9617688.8, namely a technique involving fabricating an optical
20 waveguide grating having a plurality of grating lines of refractive index variation, the and comprising the steps of:

- (i) repeatedly exposing a spatially periodic writing light pattern onto a photosensitive optical waveguide; and
- (ii) moving the writing light pattern and/or the waveguide between successive
25 exposures of the writing light pattern, so that each of at least a majority of the grating lines is generated by at least two exposures to different respective regions of the writing light pattern.

In such a technique, the apparatus and methods described earlier can easily be used to provide a writing light beam of varying grating pitch. The movement between
30 the writing beams and the waveguide can be achieved by one or more translation stages or possibly by tilting the lens 60.

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CLAIMS

1. Optical grating fabrication apparatus comprising:
a phase mask for dividing an incident light beam into a plurality of diffracted
5 beams; and

a focusing arrangement for receiving light from the phase mask and converging
at least two non-zero-order diffracted beams together so as to generate an interference
region between the converged beams so that a grating structure can be impressed on
an optical waveguide placed in the interference region;

10 the phase mask and at least a part of the focusing arrangement being moveable
with respect to one another so as to alter the angle of convergence of the converged
beams.

2. Apparatus according to claim 1, in which the focusing arrangement consists of
15 a single lens.

3. Apparatus according to claim 2, in which the lens is a biconvex spherical lens.

4. Apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 3, comprising a collimating
20 arrangement for substantially collimating the beam incident on the phase mask.

5. Apparatus according to claim 4 as dependent on claim 2 or claim 3, in which
the collimating arrangement comprises a lens that has twice the focal length as that of
the firstmentioned lens.

25 6. Apparatus according to any one of the preceding claims, comprising a
translation apparatus for providing relative translation of the grating fabrication
apparatus and an optical waveguide in which a grating is to be fabricated, so that the
interference region can be incident on different portions of the optical waveguide.

30 7. Apparatus according to any one of the preceding claims, in which the
waveguide is an optical fibre waveguide.

8. Apparatus according to any one of the preceding claims, the apparatus comprising means for repeatedly exposing the interference region onto the waveguide; and

5 means for moving the interference region and/or the waveguide between successive exposures of the writing light pattern, so that each of at least a majority of the grating lines of the waveguide grating is generated by at least two exposures to the interference region.

9. An optical grating fabrication method comprising the steps of:

10 directing a light beam onto a phase mask to divide the light beam into a plurality of diffracted beams;

converging at least two non-zero-order diffracted beams together using a focusing arrangement so as to generate an interference region between the converged beams so that a grating structure can be impressed on an optical waveguide placed in
15 the interference region; and

providing relative movement between the phase mask and at least a part of the focusing arrangement so as to alter the angle of convergence of the converged beams.

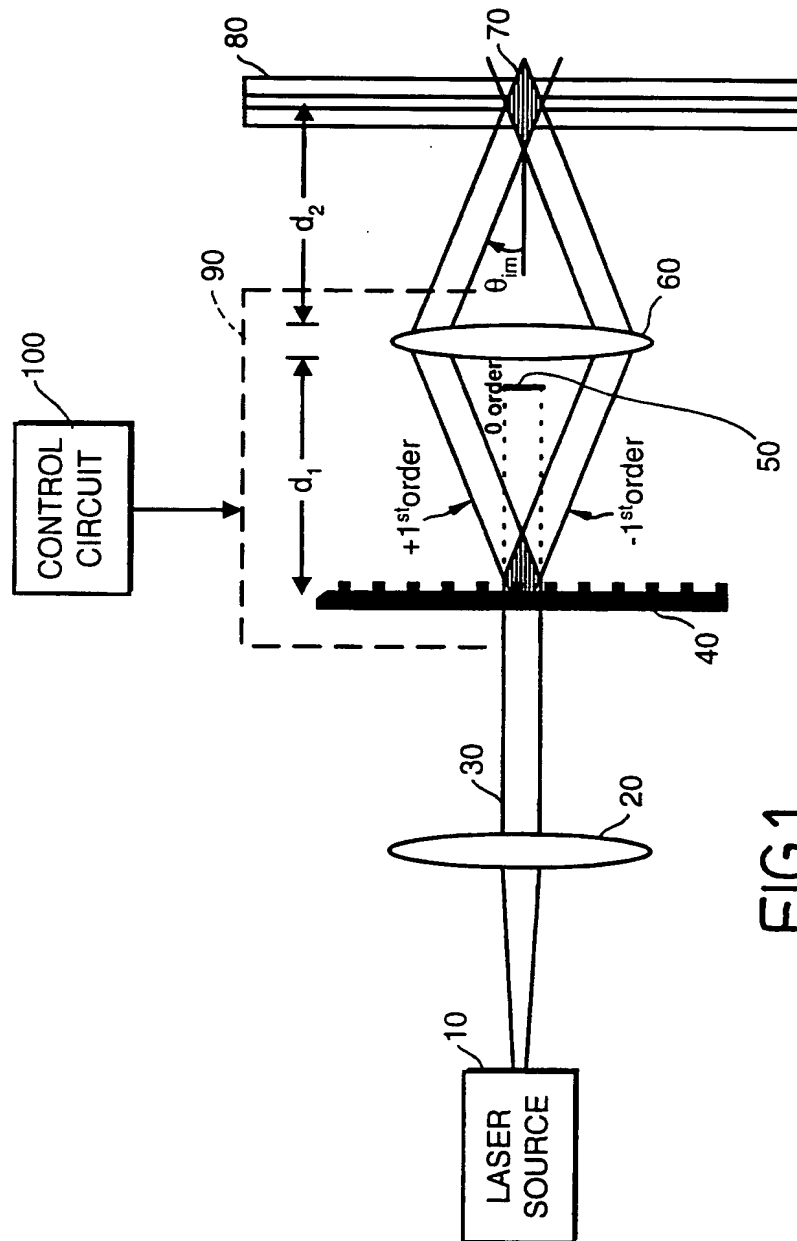


FIG.1

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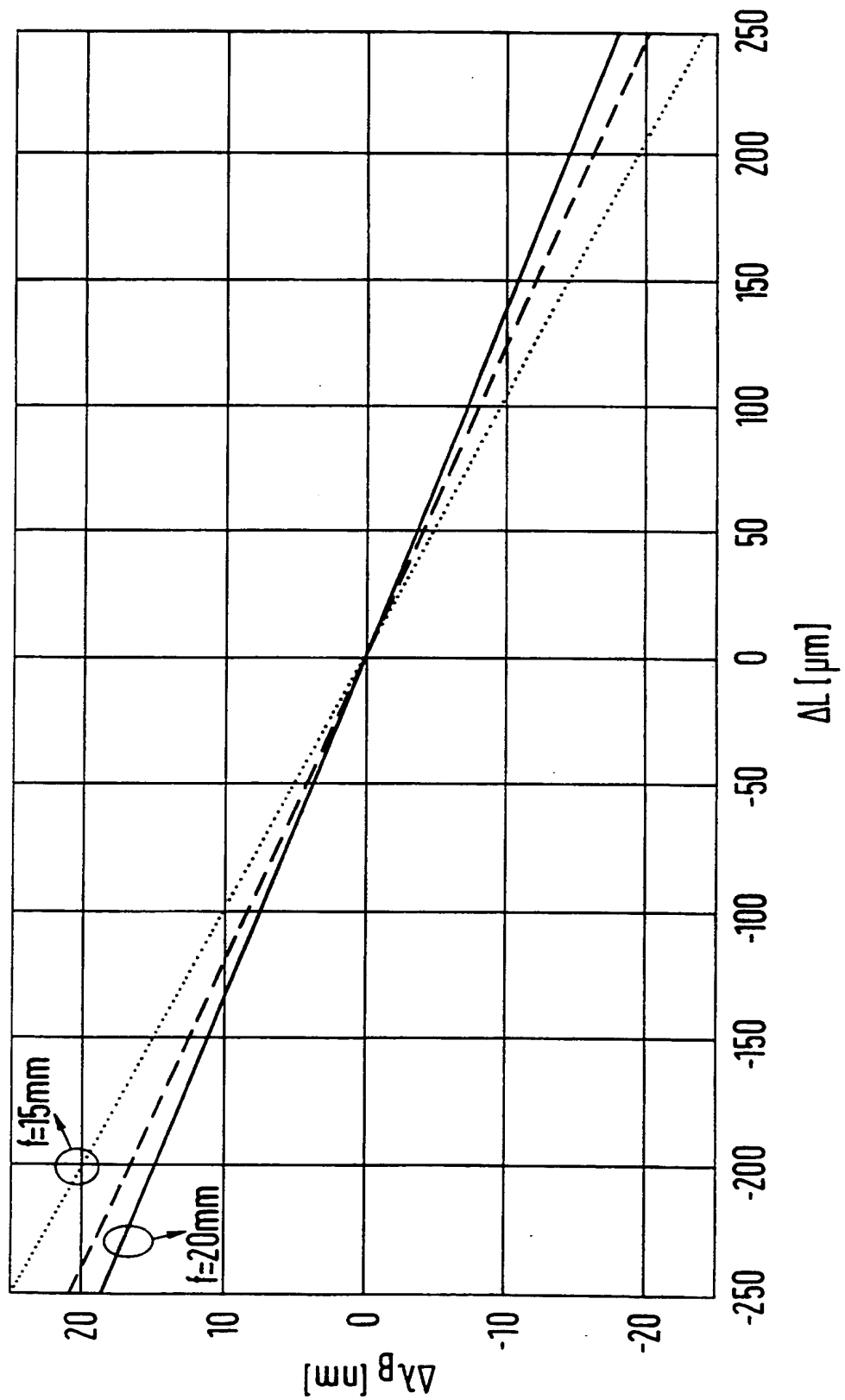


FIG. 2

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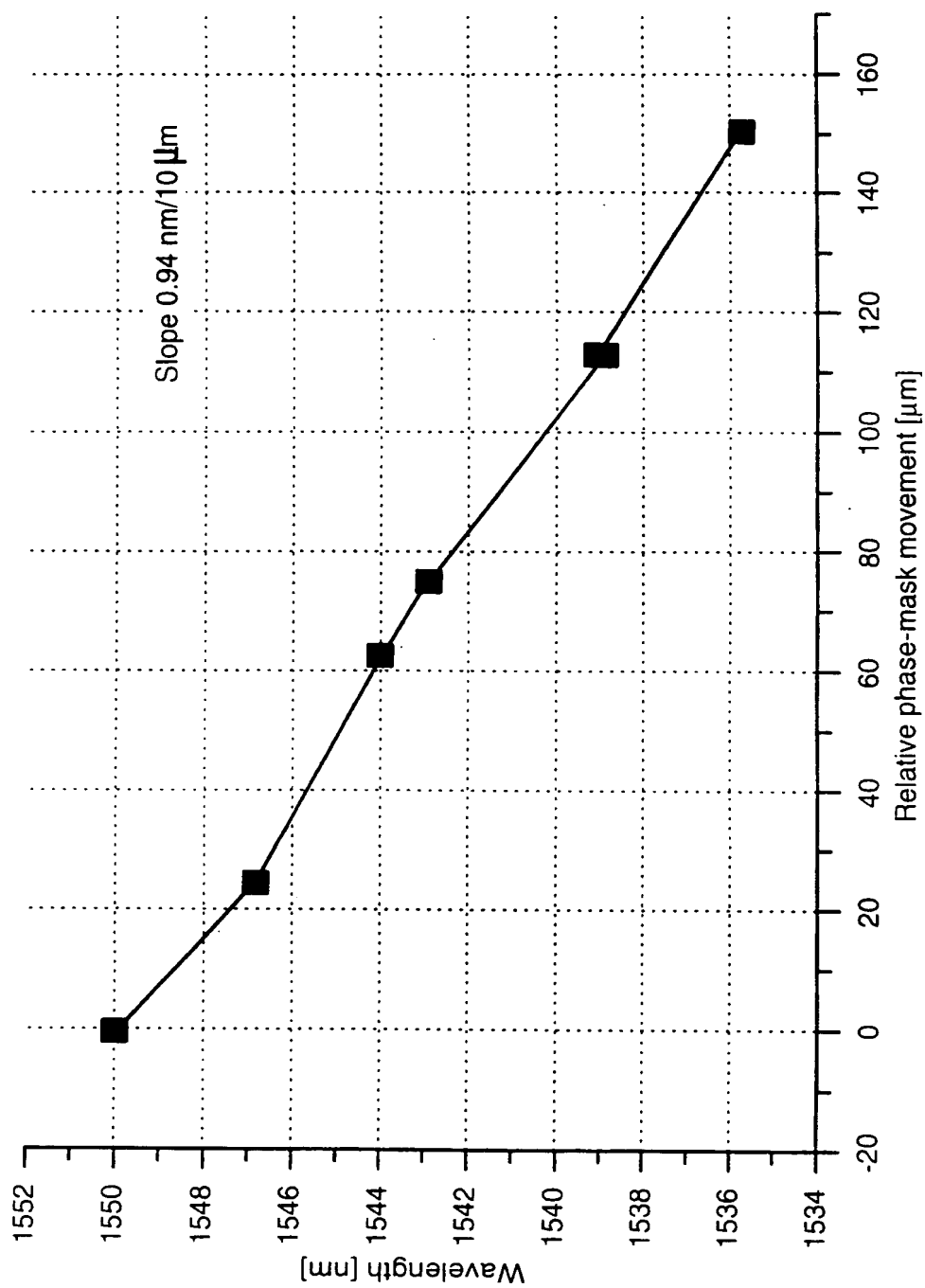


FIG.3a

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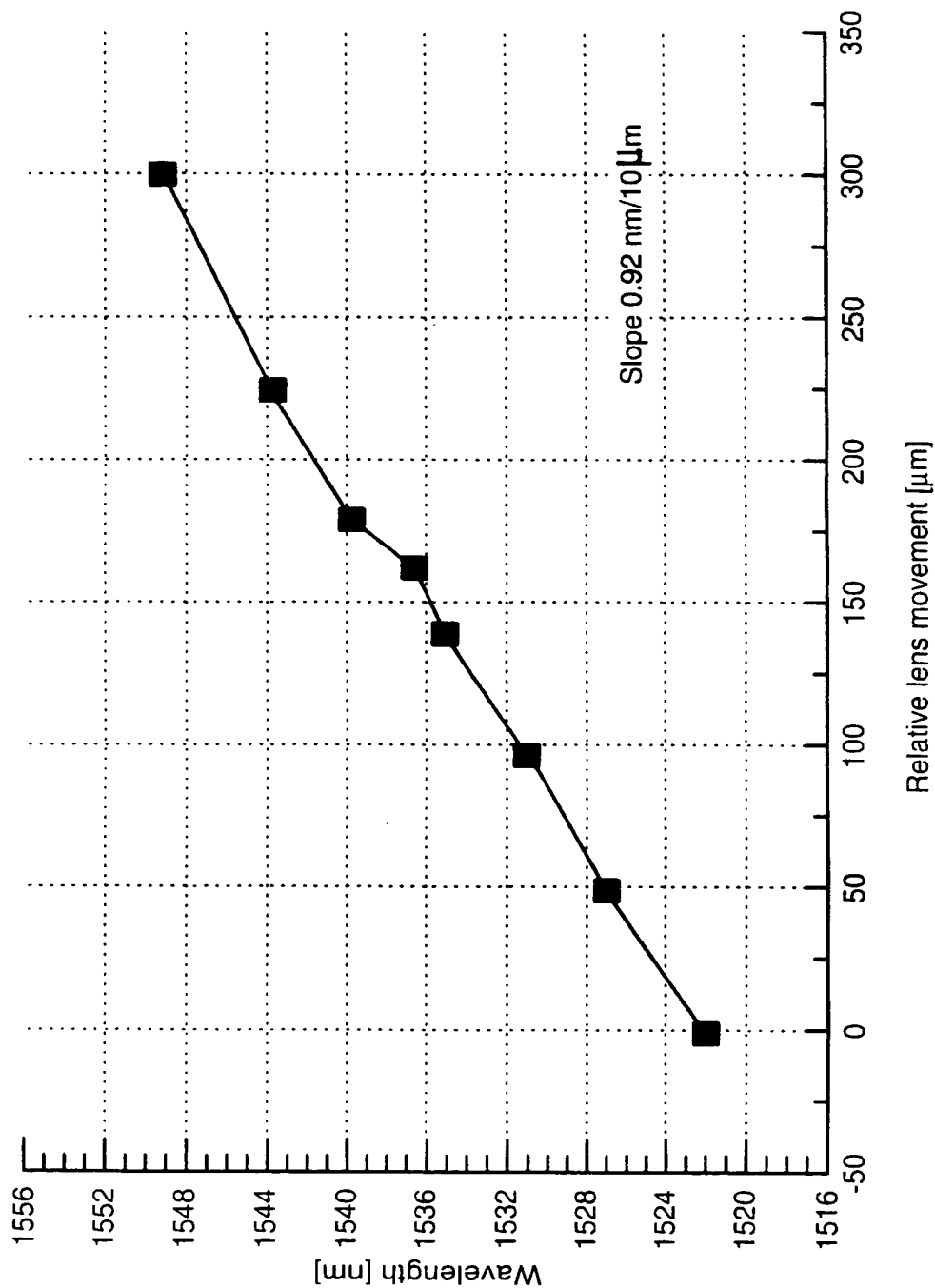


FIG.3b

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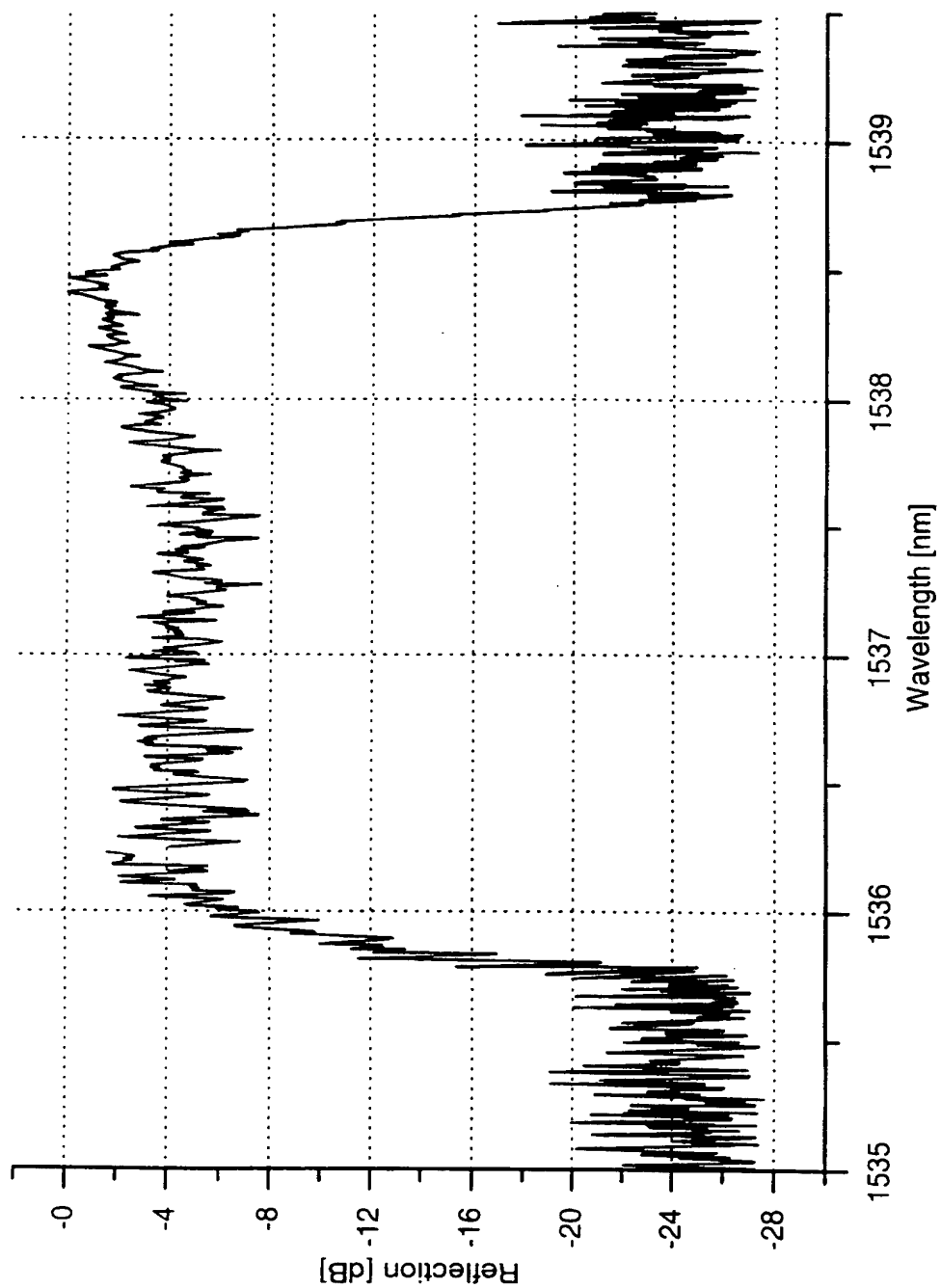


FIG. 4a

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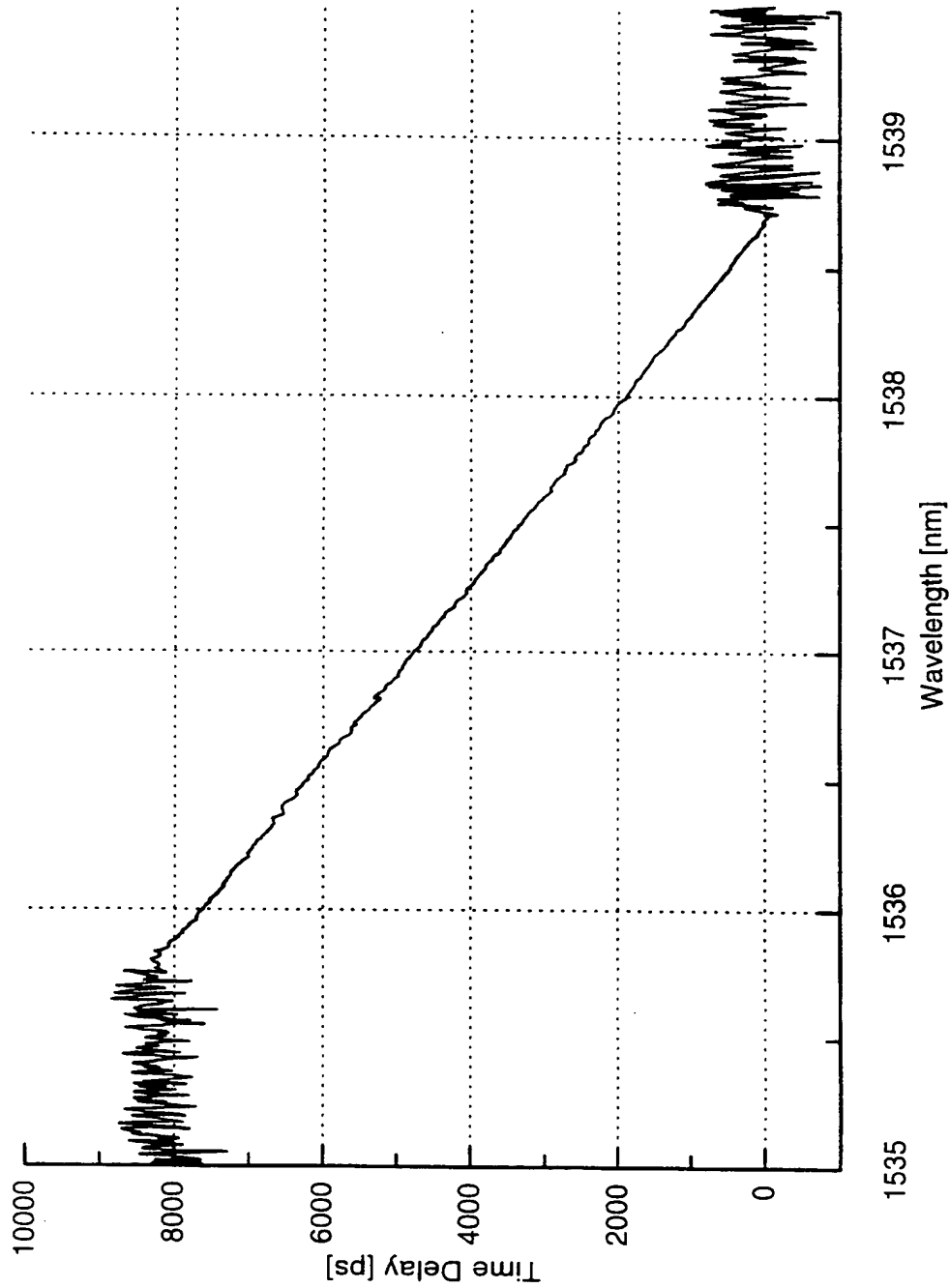


FIG.4b

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/GB 98/03176

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 6 G02B6/16 G02B6/124 G02B6/34

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6 G02B G03F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

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C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	EP 0 782 018 A (ALSTHOM CGE ALCATEL) 2 July 1997 see the whole document ---	1,2,6-9
A	US 5 655 040 A (SANSONETTI PIERRE ET AL) 5 August 1997 see the whole document ---	1,4,7-9
A	EP 0 684 491 A (NORTHERN TELECOM LTD) 29 November 1995 see column 1, line 1 - line 58 see column 2, line 1 - line 26 see figure 6 ---	1,7,9
A	US 5 482 801 A (SMITH ADLAI H ET AL) 9 January 1996 see the whole document ---	1,2,4,9
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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A	<p>US 5 367 588 A (BILODEAU FRANCOIS C ET AL) 22 November 1994 cited in the application see column 1, line 57 - line 68 see column 2, line 1 - line 48 see column 6, line 31 - line 51 see figure 5</p>	1,2,7,9
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